

# critical digest

Vol. II No. 36

June 26, 1950

The Weekly That Keeps You Informed of the Current Broadway Critical Scene

## New Revue Opens in N.Y.

Peep Show-Winter Garden, 6/28/50. Michael Todd's heralded revue featuring Lina Romay, Bozo Snyder and many others. Bobby Clark is the director. Sketches by H.I. Phillips and William Roos. Music by Harold Rome, Raymond Scott and Bhumibol (the King of Siam).

## Daily Reviewers Rate Second "Arena" Show

Julius Caesar-Arena, Hotel Edison, 6/20/50. Six pros, three cons and one so-so review can be tallied for Heilweil-Thomas second three week theatre in the round production. Coleman, Mirror, and Garland, Journal-American, considered production staged by Dan Levin and starring Basil Rathbone as the most exciting show in town. Coleman especially liked Berry Kroeger as Casca. Chapman, News, who found the production quite chummy, singled out John Holland as Brutus for praise. Atkinson, Times, suggested that either the director don't understand technique of central staging or the platform was too small. Barnes, Herald Tribune, disliked everything concerned in the production of a second rate Shakespeare play. Dash, Women's Wear Daily, termed it "theatre-in-the-flat". Dissenters thought first half of play was dull, while second half was a little more exciting. Watts, Post, thought it was too conventional, but recommended the production as one worth seeing.

## Magazine Critics View the Revivals

The Madwoman of Chaillot-City Center, 6/13/50. Keating, Cue, found the present production of the Giradoux fantasy just about perfect, while Hobe, Variety, thought it was slightly overdone. Trade paper critic noted that while audible problems of large hall had been solved, the ice company certainly wasn't making a killing on the cooling system.

The Show Off-Arena, Hotel Edison, 5/31/50-6/17/50. Add three more critics who enjoyed the George Kelly play done ala theatre-in-the-round. Marshall, Nation, thought the play was nicely paced, that the cast headed by Jane Seymour and Lee Tracy did very well. Hatch, New Republic, considered the play a perfect choice because it plays itself. Weighing both sides, he counts the lack of focus as an important detriment in central staging. Nordell, Christian Science Monitor, feels that with less able actors the 25 year old comedy might have seemed ludicrous. Instead it was a promising start for the Arena.

## Broadway Hits Revisited

Henry Daniell, the replacement for Alec Guinness in The Cocktail Party, lacks the style and underlying good humor of his predecessor, comments Hobe, Variety. While Margaret Phillips, in the role originally played by Irene Worth, brings clarity, added dimension and poignance to the part of Celia. Hugh Williams, in the role played by Robert Fléming, is believable and convincing. But it remains a keen, provocative show that holds the audience enthralled...Texas Li'l Darlin' is much superior now to the show that opened the first night, according to Coleman, Mirror. Kenny Delmar is funnier than ever and the replacements are tops. He also approved of the newly decorated air-cooled lobby.

## Critical Notes

N.Y. World Telegram & Sun strike continues. Current reports say that paper is ready to hold out all summer against the CIO Guild if necessary...Garland, Journal American, points out that while he wrote for a Greenwich Village throwaway, he resigned from the Critics Circle.

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' The Green Room Department '  
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**ROLE OF REVIEWER...**The purpose of the newspaper reviewer, in the opinion of Hawkins, WT&S, is to explain enough about the play so each reader can make up his own mind if he wants to see it, the critic said on WNBC Critic's Corner. This "shopping service" feature of drama pages is especially important today when theatre prices are so high.

**NO TAG LINES...**Current hits don't have the wonderful tag and laugh lines the old hits had, Chapman, News, discovered when picking the ten best plays of this season. "Papa, What Happens Here?" from The Happy Time, comes the nearest to such famous lines as "Nobody here but people -- good", from Harvey. After filling a column with his favorites, Chapman asked for his readers pet lines.

**STAY HOME...**Don't bother making that theatre trip to Europe, advises George Jean Nathan. Each country still has the trite entertainment he saw many years ago, while the show on the boat can be expected to be worse than ever.

**SUMMER CLEANING...**Shows playing through the summer need everybody's full cooperation, points out Garland, Journal American. Thus it is best that blase players come to the aid of their plays by leaving. One fed up with success principal harms an entire production. Better an enthusiastic pinch-hitter than a bored original.

**IDEA OF THE WEEK...**Whatever happened to plans for a central box office for buying theatre tickets, asks Wahls, News.

**CATHOLIC VIEW...**Theatre is not sinful or unlawful, Very Reverend Francis Connell, Catholic University said on NBC Catholic Hour. But every play should have something artistic, cultural or generally humorous in it. The words must be in accordance with moral and religious standards if the author wants to bring "God in to the theatre". He harshly condemned current plays and movies for ignoring these standards.

**BUSMAN'S HOLIDAY...**Relatively speaking, theatre and travel can be indulged in by rich and poor, comments Morehouse, WT&S in his "Busman's Holiday" piece in Theatre Time. Once accomplished their memories can never be taken away. Though he has visited in more than 70 countries, the columnist-critic has many more spots to see. His most recent trips were to Turkey and Bermuda.

**LIQUID ACTING...**Dubbing central staging "theatre in the lap" and "drama at your shin-bones", Chapman, News, adds a new hazard of the playgoer. Several of the more enthusiastic players in the Arena's Julius Caesar did more than mouth the words, they "sprayed" them.

**FORGOTTEN DUNSANY...**Let's have more plays by Lord Dunsany urges Watts, Post, after viewing with favor the recent revival of The Gods of the Mountain produced by the Abbe Practical Workshop. The play seemed just as good as when he first saw it. He hopes the forgetfulness toward the Irish writer is a temporary thing.

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' Radio & Television News '  
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NBS bought the Hudson Theatre for a reported \$150,000. It plans to use the house where Detective Story is now playing as a television studio. Company also owns Belasco Theatre on same street...Shuberts, reports WINS Martin Starr, are seeking Rockefeller aid in establishing TV center at Fort Lee, N.J....Full hour ANTA video show is being packaged by Eugene Burr and Ben Bodec. Program will use both stars and local groups...NBC and RCA may be the angels for the \$250,000 show Call Me Mister, musical by Berlin-Crouse-Lindsay...WR Lee Tracy's final broadcast will be at 7:45 P.M., June 28, instead of the usual morning time...Columbia School of Journalism expects the sale of Pulitzer prize works to a television show for two million dollars will put the school on a paying basis for the first time.

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' Summer Theatre & Off Broadway '  
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The Second Man opened Westport's 1950 season. Garland, Journal American, found the S.N. Behrman hit starring Franchot Tone and staged by press agent Jean Dalrymple enticing entertainment...St. John Terrell's Music Circus version of The Cat and the Fiddle was enjoyed by Selvester, News. Dick Smart, who was featured in the revival of the Kern-Harbach revue, looks like a likely candidate for a Broadway musical...Pirandello's metaphysical melodrama Right You Are (If You Think You Are), produced by The Players at YMA Playhouse won the raves of Watts, Post, and Garland. Both praised skillful production and acting, plus fact that 1918 play is still interesting.

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' Interview Round Up '  
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GLORIA LANE...Actress-Singer making her debut in The Consul styles her acting role on reel people. The salesgirls in the swanky Fifth Avenue stores helped her develop her characterization as the nasty secretary. These girls used to overawe her with their snobbishness she complained to Sheaffer, Eagle.

JOHN S. WILSON...Director of Theatre Guild shows finds the greatest problem in developing new playwrights, he stated on WGBS Margaret Arlen. Though everything is read, so far he has not found a producible script which arrived in the mail. If a script has merit, it usually has an agent attached. Westport, Theatre Guild's summer showcase, will try out seven new plays.

BASIL RATHBONE...Star of Arena's Julius Caesar chose the role of Cassius because it is the most important in the Bard's drama, he told Rice, Post. His enthusiasm for theatre-in-the-round is enormous. And his praise for the young director, Dan Levin, is more than encouraging. He should be one of the most important directors. The only thing to stop him, says Rathbone, is the infinite stupidity of Broadway.

SAM WANAMAKER...Producer-director of "Festival Theatre", the new repertory theatre opening at the Fulton, July 24, told WNET Faye Emerson that he thinks his group will be the first successful theatre of this type in NY. He hopes they have learned the errors of past attempts. Emerson stars in the first two week play, Henri Becque's Parisienne.

RAY MIDDLETON...New star of South Pacific detailed a few of his many interests to WNBC Mary Margaret McBride, broadcasting from her summer apartment at Towers Hotel, Brooklyn. He hopes to get a full photographic coverage of the hit show from all angles. And he is co-partner in the famous Bill Brown's Health Farm.

GERTRUDE LAWRENCE...Mrs. Richard Aldrich is planning a busy few years. First she appears in a tryout of Traveler's Joy, an English play by Arthur Macrae, at several New England summer theatres. Then to London for Noel Coward's Home in Colonial until Rodgers and Hammerstein are ready for Anna and the King of Siam. Rice, Post, got the agenda at Sardis. She is also busy knitting George Bernard Shaw a pair of grey mittens, Lewis, Cue, discovered in a visit to the Aldriches midtown apartment.

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' Random Items '  
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Winchell's praise filled paragraph for The Wisteria Trees resulted in an increase of \$3000 in business in one week...A ritzy Long Island family, who has no faith in drama critics, send their chauffeur to review the plays...Rice, Post, selected Joel Turner's Best of Spirits as the play he will sponsor at the Putnam County Playhouse...Gabriel, Cue, is a collector of lurid novels, Sobol, Journal American, discovered...Two readers have presented Morehouse, WT&S, with their old program collections.



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 ' Key to NYC Criticism At A Glance '   
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Shows are rated as to how the critics liked them, not if they think they will be hits. "So-So" means the critic did not state directly if he recommended the show for an entertaining or stimulating evening.

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|------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. NY Times                  | 11. Newark News         | 21. Catholic World  |
| 2. NY Herald Tribune         | 12. Women's Wear Daily  | 22. Commonweal      |
| 3. NY News                   | 13. Daily Worker        | 23. Cue             |
| 4. NY Mirror                 | 14. Wall Street Journal | 24. Chr.Sci.Monitor |
| 5. NY Compass (PM, Star)     | 15. Journal of Commerce | 25. Sat.Review Lit. |
| 6. NY Post                   | 16. George Jean Nathan  | 26. Newsweek        |
| 7. NY Sun (Morehouse)        | 17. Morning Telegraph   | 27. Time            |
| 8. NY Journal American       | 18. Variety             | 28. Nation          |
| 9. NY World Telegram and Sun | 19. Billboard           | 29. New Republic    |
| 10. Brooklyn Eagle           | 20. Theatre Arts        | 30. New Yorker      |

The Cocktail Party-Miller, 1/2/50. Pro: 20 votes. Con: 2-9-14-22-25-29.  
So-So: 16-30. None: 13-21.

Come Back, Little Sheba-Booth, 2/15/50. Pro: 16 votes. Con: 2-4-7-12-27.  
So-So: 3-6-30. None: 13-15-21-24-25-28.

The Consul-Barrymore, 3/15/50. Pro: 26 votes. Con: 22. So-So: 6-29. None: 21.

Death of a Salesman-Morosco, 2/10/49. Pro: 28 votes. Con: 29. So-So: 27. None: 5

Detective Story-Hudson, 3/23/49. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 5-10-11-13-16-23-25-28-29.

Gentlemen Prefer Blondes-Ziegfeld, 12/8/49. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 6-21-28.  
So-So: 16-19-22-23-27.

The Happy Time-Plymouth, 1/24/50. Pro: 20 votes. Con: 5-6-7-20-26-27-28-30.  
None: 13-21.

Kiss Me, Kate-Century-12-31-48. Pro: 28 votes. Con: 29. None: 28.

Lost in the Stars-Music Box, 10/30/49. Pro: 14 votes. Con: 8-9-13-20-21-22-24-25-28-29-30. So-So: 4-27. None: 16.

The Member of the Wedding-Empire, 1/5/50. Pro: 25 votes. Con: 16.  
So-So: 2-27-30. None: 21.

Mister Roberts-Alvin, 2/13/48. Pro: 24 votes. Con: 21-24. So-So: 13-16-17.  
None: 28.

Peter Pan-Imperial, 4/24/50. Pro: 19 votes. Con: 8-16-30. So-So: 6-14-19.  
None: 13-20-21-28.

South Pacific-Majestic, 4/8/49. Pro: 19 votes. Con: 27. So-So: 23.  
None: 5-10-11-13-14-16-22-28-29.

Texas Li'l Darlin'-Hellinger, 11/25/49. Pro: 12 votes. Con: 1-4-7-8-18-19-23-29-30. So-So: 2-5-10-11-20-26-27. None: 25-28.

Where's Charley?-St. James, 10/11/48. Pro: 16 votes. Con: 6-7-12-13-16-19-22-24-25-26. So-So: 4-27. None: 10-28.

The Wisteria Trees-Martin Beck, 3/29/50. Pro: 14 votes. Con: 2-7-9-10-16-22-23-25-26-27-28-30. So-So: 18-29. None: 13-21.

Tickets Please!-Coronet, 4/27/50. Pro: 20 votes. Con: 11-16-29-30. So-So: 26.

